

THE up and down race for the Rothmans Isthmian League championship is not over yet. Before Saturday, the title looked the certain property of Enfield but with the leaders losing 1-0 at home to Leatherhead and Wanderers beating Barking 5-1, anything could happen in the remaining few weeks of the season.

Enfield's defeat, although not totally surprising as Leatherhead had won there already this season in a cup game, keeps Wanderers hoping. At the moment they have 78 points compared with Enfield's 85. If they win their game in hand the lead will be cut to four points and if they beat Enfield at Loakes Park on May 8, there will be just one point between the two.

Close behind the Blues, however, are Dagenham. They have a game in hand which would put them one point in front of Wycombe, if they were successful.

Obviously Enfield, with the

points in the bag, are in the best position at the present time. But the points they are dropping could prove decisive come May 18.

**Wanderers' 5-1 triumph** over Barking on Saturday was not quite as comfortable as the scoreline suggests, although they always looked the superior side on the day. The man who contributed most to the victory was Keith Searle, who hit his second hat-trick in two weeks. Things have not all been roses for Keith this season and there's no doubt he struggled earlier in the term. Just recently, however, the centre forward has improved radically and now looks more confident than at any other stage of the campaign. It could be more than coincidence that he is coming into top form as Wycombe begin their final push for the championship.

Searle had Dylan Evans and Steve Perrin alongside him again on Saturday, with Tony Horseman wearing the number 12 shirt. For once, Perrin had a

game he will want to forget. Tightly marked by Ken Varney, he rarely got into the match and had it not been for Searle's finishing, the Blues might have struggled for goals as they did against Dulwich last Tuesday.

Both defences looked a little suspect early on with Peter Burton causing problems in the air. The bounce of the ball was tricky too. Although soft and spongy in the middle, the pitch looked hard in the penalty areas and errors were common. It was from a mistake in the 13th minute that Wycombe went ahead. Goalkeeper Brian Blake threw the ball out for Bobby Fowler who, under no pressure, played it square to Dave Waite. As the ball bobbed on the hard surface, Evans nipped in, dispossessed the centre half and then drove past Blake, in-off the right hand upright.

Wanderers won three quick corners before going further ahead 10 minutes later. Liam Joughin was pulled up for a foul on Evans, five yards outside the box. Howard Kennedy lined

himself up for a 'special' and powered the ball around the "wall." Blake managed to parry the shot but Searle was there to slide home the rebound and make it 2-0.

Barking were not prepared to let Wycombe have things their own way, however. They pulled a goal back in the 27th minute when Mal Crissell crossed into the box following a corner. Keith Searle tried to boot clear but sliced the ball skywards and Fowler headed across the box. In raced Burton to head towards the top of the net and although John Maskell got his hands to the ball and Alan Phillips booted it clear, the referee and linesman rightly decided the ball had crossed the line.

Within two minutes, Wycombe had restored their two goal advantage. Keith Mead sent a long ball through the middle which Searle controlled well before slotting past Blake. The goalmouth action didn't stop there. In the next few minutes there were chances at both ends and play swung at a

terrific pace around the pitch. Charlie Williams shot straight at Maskell while Perrin broke clear a minute later. Then Phillips headed Kennedy's corner against the crossbar.

Wycombe's pressure began to wear Barking down towards the end of the half. The two centre backs Fowler and Waite, made to look painfully slow and lethargic by Wanderers' speedy front men, gave away several corners in the last 10 minutes of the half. By the interval, Wycombe had amassed 12 flag kicks.

After that hectic first half activity, I suppose a disappointing second period was almost inevitable. The half began well enough with Williams driving the ball over after Maskell had dropped Joe Fascione's corner and then Searle completing his hat-trick in the 58th minute with a fine goal. After that, however, play deteriorated and threatened to send us all to sleep until the fifth and final goal came in the last minute.

Searle's hat-trick came after Fascione lost possession in a challenge with Terry Reardon. The ball went loose and Searle pushed it clear of the defence before running on and hammering a rising left foot shot past the helpless keeper.

With a three goal lead and the points clearly in the bag, Wanderers went well and truly off the boil after that. The standard of passing deteriorated and the supply of chances dwindled into nothing. Barking almost pulled another goal back when Mead's back pass fell short but Williams toe-poked the ball a yard wide of an open goal.

Mick Holifield, who has disappointed in recent matches, almost hit the gasometer with one amazing shot over the top in the last few minutes, with Horseman now playing instead of Evans. In the 84th minute Perrin hit the upright with a full-blooded shot and then Wycombe sealed their victory and fifth £40 bonus of the season with a fifth goal in the 90th minute.

Mead drove a long free kick into the Barking box. Blake failed to intercept and the ball bounced past the goalkeeper and was bundled into the net by Horseman and Phillips. The skipper was given the credit after the game.

**WYCOMBE:** J. Maskell, D. Alexander, K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Hand, H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Holifield, D. Evans (sub. A. Horseman) 75 minutes), K. Searle, S. Perrin.

**BARKING:** B. Blake, R. Joughin, R. Fowler (sub. P. Whittle 59 mins.), D. Waite, K. Varney, G. Ferry, J. Fascione, C. Ballard, C. Williams, P. Burton, M. Crissell.

**Referee:** R. Lewis.

**Half-time:** 3-1. Goalscorers, Wycombe — Searle 3 (23, 29, 58), Evans (13), Phillips (90). Barking — Burton (27).